

WATCHES AND JEWELRY

## Baselworld, brands look to adapt the trade show

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*Baselworld introduces chatbot. Image credit: Baselworld*

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

With the watch industry rethinking the relevance of a trade show concept, the sector's biggest fair Baselworld is still hosting a lineup of iconic brands while also pivoting in hopes to evolve.

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Many luxury watch brands and groups have decided to invest in other outlets and offerings, as they believe the trade show is no longer suited to the modern audience. However, Baselworld is still looking to remain relevant as it launches a chatbot to better assist attendees, while timepiece manufacturers such as Gucci, Hublot, Bulgari and Rolex are aiming to gain recognition with unique designs unveiled at the event.

"Baselworld is still an important part of the watch industry, where many brands unveil the latest innovations and designs from their brands," said Dennis Steaman, marketing manager of jewelry at MT Agency. "While the consumers are becoming closer to brands, these marketers are finding new ways to reach them beyond the trade show."

### Baselworld innovations

The role of the watch has dramatically shifted. Rather than purchasing a Rolex watch to show off one's wealth, today consumers look to Instagram-worthy experiences as status symbols.

Smartwatches have also forced many watchmakers to rethink their designs and technology or heighten their focus on creating one-of-a-kind collectible models.

In addition to these changing factors for the watch industry, the trade show itself is becoming less important as consumers and brands become closer. There is no longer an extreme gap between manufacturer and customer.

Last July, Swiss watchmaking group Swatch announced it was officially pulling out of Baselworld.

The company cited the soaring expenses of exhibiting at Baselworld as well as the event's growing irrelevance to the way customers buy watches today for its decision. Swatch Group follows a few other high-end watch brands who have all stopped exhibiting at the event ([see story](#)).

Responding to the need for more digital consumer-facing engagement at Baselworld, the show has launched a chatbot to act as a personal concierge for visitors at this year's event, being held from March 21 to 26 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The chatbot is available on a variety of platforms to cater to all individuals in the form they prefer, including Facebook Messenger, Skype, Telegram and Baselworld's Web site.

Microsoft Bot Framework powers the new chatbot, helping attendees find any information they need, including location, brand insight and more.

While Baselworld itself is working to evolve, brands that are appearing at the show are also focusing on the new.

At the trade show, Italian fashion label Gucci is revealing a new line of watches with a distinct Gucci feel but unique designs. Its G-Timeless automatic line features a new interlocking G motif on the face of the watches.

Another G-Timeless design features a printed snakehead on the dial, and the snake's body on the steel mesh bracelet. The theme is based on Gucci's Kingsnake motif.



*Gucci's latest design revealed at Baselworld. Image credit: Gucci*

The label is launching a new watch collection altogether, which includes four new unisex quartz timepieces. The design features a rounded square case with three windows featuring white rotating disks for the hour, minute and date.

Swiss watchmaker Hublot is introducing a new chapter to its partnership with automaker Ferrari, as it debuts the new Classic Fusion Ferrari GT piece, inspired by video game series "Gran Turismo."

Jewelry maker Bulgari is introducing new models this year as well, which it believes are breaking the mold.

One of the two new designs launching is Bulgari's Serpenti Seduttori in a unique shape, moving away from the perfect circle featured in gold. The shape evokes the notion of a snake's head.

The jeweler also states it is breaking its fifth world record with the Octo Finissimo Chronograph GMT, the world's slimmest self-winding watch.

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*Bulgari's latest watch designs. Image credit: Bulgari*

Rolex is also introducing a new color for its Sea-Dweller, bringing 18-carat yellow gold to the collection. In addition, the brand is showcasing the GMT-Master II in a black-and-blue Batman motif.

Tag Heuer released a new smart watch concept aimed a potential new audience, known for its affluence.

The Swiss watchmaker revealed its Connected Module 45, a smart watch devoted to golfing. The watch is priced at almost \$2,000.

Previous year's

Last year's Baselworld saw the theme of announcements from timepiece manufacturers revealing that the watch industry has finally embraced the digital world.

After years of watchmakers refusing to accept the shift to ecommerce and digital, the 2018 trade show in Switzerland indicated that the time has finally come. Hublot and Frederique Constant were a few of the heritage watch brands who innovated in smartwatches, while others such as Tag Heuer and Richemont bet big on ecommerce, but Baselworld's significance might be shrinking due to the digital uprising ([see story](#)).

"Watch designs from smart watches to limited editions have launched at this years Basel," Mr. Steadman said. "It will be interesting to see how these brands will move forward with their releases from here."

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